

Evangelism Sunday 2020

Sunday, September 27, 2020

Introduction

Vital Congregations may be identified by seven Bible-based ideals or “marks.” One of the marks suggests that the congregation have a clear focus on Intentional Authentic Evangelism. Too often the tasks of sharing the good news of living as Jesus did is relegated to an “Evangelism Team.” Some even think it is solely the pastor’s responsibility. Evangelism Sunday is a time when we are reminded of our equal responsibility to live as Christ did, so that we draw others to God.

The writer of Philippians encourages us that one way to mimic Christ’s life is to avoid our own selfish ambitions and conceit so that we might exalt others and look to their interests rather than just our own (Philippians 2:3–4). How critical this message is for such a time as this, when a pandemic can be controlled by laying aside our individual conceit. By openly obeying the advice of health-care professionals, the church humbles itself and demonstrates the mind of Christ.

Likewise, in this season of social unrest and heightened awareness of the value of the lives of Black, Brown and Indigenous people, the church is called to lift God’s standards of justice and true equality for all of God’s Creations. Certainly, these standards apply to “all,” but “all” have not suffered equally from having their very necks crushed under the knees of white supremacy and their humanity under the wheels of oppression. Black, Brown and Indigenous people have. The church is also called to affirm the humanity of members of the LGBTQIA community. Whether in the streets in protests, in courtrooms or in the voting booth, Intentional Authentic Evangelism is drawing others to Christ by being a living example, by “emptying ourselves out” so that others have visual and tangible examples of the good news.

We invite you to engage the other marks of Vital Congregations as well — building Caring Relationships, Lifelong Discipleship Formation, Outward Incarnational Focus, Empowering Servant Leadership, exercising Ecclesial Health and asking God for Spirit-Inspired Worship. All of this is so that others may see God at work in us, enabling us both to will and to work for God’s good pleasure and likewise be led to good works themselves (Philippians 2:13).

For further details, please go to our website for a copy of the Vital Congregations Initiative Immediate Toolkit. In closing, we look forward to seeing you all at our “Re-Thinking Evangelism” Conference on Oct. 12–14, 2020.

Peace, power and blessings,

Rev. Carlton D. Johnson

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Associate for Vital Congregations

- *First Reading Exodus 17:1–7*
- *Psalms 78:1–4, 12–16*
- *Second Reading Philippians 2:1–13*
- *Gospel Matthew 21:23–32*

Lectionary Readings

Exodus 17:1–7

17 From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.² The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?”³ But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?”⁴ So Moses cried out to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”⁵ The LORD said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.⁶ I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.⁷ He called the place Massah[a] and Meribah,[b] because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

Philippians 2:1–13

Imitating Christ’s Humility

2 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was[a] in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Shining as Lights in the World

12 Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

For pastors and worship leaders as you prepare:

1. Read Scripture texts aloud. Refrain from note taking; just allow yourself to hear the text. Spend time prayerfully reflecting on what you hear. Reread the texts, making notes and highlighting as you go. Reflect on the Word: initial thoughts, questions, feelings, ideas.
2. Spend a few moments individually reflecting on the following questions. Then talk with other worship leaders and/or pastors about your responses.
 - *How do you understand evangelism?*
 - *How does your congregation understand and interpret evangelism corporately in life together?*
 - *Does your understanding and the congregation's practices match up? Why or why not?*
 - *Reflect on your own personal story. When did the gospel become good news that grounded and claimed your life in Christ? Who shared that news with you?*
 - *In your life, who have been some of the most influential lights that pointed to Christ? How did they proclaim Christ to you?*
 - *How does your congregation share the good news with others? In the congregation? Outside the church?*
 - *How are people thirsty and complaining in your ministry context?*
 - *What basic needs do people have in your community?*
 - *Who is missing in your congregation?*
 - *Can you think of a situation in which your congregation imitated Christ to others?*
 - *Whether through social media, an email or in meetings this week, ask members to tell you their thoughts on evangelism. What are they afraid of? What limits their spreading the good news?*
 - *How do you and your congregation move from a planned evangelism strategy to living out the good news as a part of your identity, a part intrinsic to your humanity? What do you believe it will take?*
 - *How does your congregation share their unique stories? How is humanity shared? What are the practices that allow this to happen?*
 - *What might God be stirring in you? How might God be calling you into mission?*
3. Review commentaries, and may the Spirit guide your worship to encounter the living God in experiences of wonder that transform hearts and minds forever.

Liturgical resources for Evangelism Sunday

Gathering

Prayer of the Day (*prayed silently as worshipers gather*)

God of Good News, you call us to be imitators of Christ sharing the gospel with all who thirst for righteousness, justice, freedom and peace. You call us to set aside self-interest and self-ambition in order to proclaim Christ crucified and risen. Help us to live a life worthy of Christ. Help us to worship in Spirit and in truth; to offer you all praise and glory. May the Good News of Jesus Christ be poured out in our lives, so that all may taste the living water of your salvation and grace. For we pray in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prelude

Call to Worship (*Psalm 78:1-4*)

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old,

People: things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us.

All: We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. Let us worship God.

Hymn of Praise

#616 (*Glory to God*) Our God Is an Awesome God (Awesome God)

Confession and Pardon

God of our Salvation, our souls thirst for your grace; our lives long for your mercy; our world cries out for your love. Yet, we do not live with the same mind that is in Christ Jesus. We trade following Christ for selfish ambition and self-interest. We fall short of the glory of God, and leave your people wandering in the wilderness of this world. Forgive us, O God, for the ways we do not proclaim your Good News to others. Forgive us when this world is wrought with turmoil and racial hatred, disease, injustice, oppression, persecution and evil of every kind. Make us imitators of Christ: sharing in the same mind and the same Spirit of the one who came to redeem all of Creation. (Offer a moment of silence for personal confession and reflection.)

Assurance of Pardon

Leader: God provided water in the wilderness to give drink to God's chosen people. God brought forth God's only Son, Jesus Christ, to empty himself to the point of death on a cross, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Thanks be to God that in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Amen.

People: In Christ, we are a new Creation! Let us share the good news! Amen.

Hymn Response

#839 (*Glory to God*) Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine!
(*You may select a particular verse or choose to sing the whole hymn.*)

The Peace

(Share the peace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, with others. Remember that all come with their own stories, all hunger and thirst for truth, and all people of God are longing for peace. We can offer a glimmer of Christ's light when we embrace one another in peace.)

Leader: May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: In the grace of God, let us offer peace to one another.

The Word

Prayer for Illumination

God of Spirit and truth, breathe new life into your Word so that hearts are transformed, minds are renewed and souls are stirred in you. May the proclamation of your Good News change our lives forever, so that we do not leave here the same. Show us your wonder, O God, so that we might live as imitators of Christ Jesus this day and forevermore. Amen.

First Reading Exodus 17:1–7 (*You may choose to switch readings, or to read from Matthew 21:23–32*)

Second Reading Philippians 2:1–13

Sermon

Hymn:

#328 (*Glory to God*) Praise God, All You Nations (Da n'ase) (Psalm 117)

Litany for Evangelism Sunday

Written by the Rev. Carlton Johnson, Associate for Vital Congregations, PC(USA)

God who created us each of us in love, equally in your image and with a desire that we live together in love and unity. God who watched as we failed your original plan and continuously abandon your dream for us. God who sent your son Jesus as an example and teacher that we might be reunited with you and that we know how to live according to your will and in unity with each other.

God of love, forgiveness, restoration, as we go, guide our steps to draw others to you.

With caring eyes, you see how we often fail to properly care for the earth. With caring eyes, you see how we glorify being busy over spending time with you and with our families. With caring eyes, you see how we neglect our health and the health of others. With caring eyes, you see how even in the midst of a pandemic with daily deaths numbering in the hundreds, we think of ourselves more than we do others.

God of care, as we go, guide our minds to think of others more than we do ourselves.

With a broken heart, you have seen through the ages how we have exchanged your call to draw others to you by our love with a directive to go into other nations and tell them our personal desires for their lives. With a broken heart, you have watched how, without any consultation whatsoever with any of these nations, we attack the ways of being of countries not like ours, communities not like ours, people who look different than we do and people who choose to love different than we do claiming that you directed us to do so.

God of the oppressed, as we go, show us that the lives of others matter because they matter to you.

God of the oppressed, show us how to love.

We desire the complete joy in which you created us in the beginning. Give us one love, one accord and one mind.

Philippians 2:1: If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Prayers of the People

(This time should be an opportunity for people to share their stories, to lift where their lives hunger and thirst for peace, justice and compassion. One option would be to invite those attending to write down prayer concerns or joys that can be read aloud during this time or placed in a basket for the pastor to read later. Pastors or worship leaders may even invite people to share their prayer requests or joys aloud after moments of silence in the main prayer. Whatever the option, time should be created for people to share their joys and concerns in this sacred space before God and others. If prayer requests are shared aloud before the congregation, do not be afraid to ask for volunteers to pray for those requests during the week. In this way, we remember that we are connected to a particular community of Christ.)

The Eucharist

Offering (Offering our gifts and service to God is a sacred time of giving back a portion of all the Lord has given to us. In gratitude for God's grace, in acknowledgment of God's wondrous works, we set aside this time for an offering to God. Imagine ways in which your congregation might offer gifts and service in the name of God. Invite the congregation to offer incarnational ways they might serve the Lord and invite them into a time of prayerfully bringing those before the Lord, whether physically putting them in an offering plate or prayerfully naming those before the Lord.)

Leader: God did not withhold water to God's chosen people in the wilderness. God emptied God's self in giving us Christ Jesus, God's Son, so that we might know God's redeeming and wondrous saving power. Therefore, in the Good News of Christ Jesus, we give back a portion of all that God has given to us with our tithes and our offerings.

Doxology

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Leader: Scripture says they will gather from North and South, East and West, to sit at the table of the Lord. And just like on the night Christ was betrayed and handed over by his disciples, Christ knew that when we would come to this table there would be faithful and faithless; there would be those who are starving and those who have never known want; there would be bankers and prisoners, strangers and friends, marginalized and majority, leaders and day laborers. Christ knowingly set this table for the broken and the bold, the immigrant and the citizen, the wealthy and the poor, the Democrat and the Republican, the man and the woman, and for every other human being given the breath of life in the image of God. This is Christ's table. It is a beacon of hope, a gift of love, poured out for all to taste and see that the Lord is good. It is Christ who binds us together and Christ who bids us come.

People: With humble hearts of gratitude, we come to you, O Lord.

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Leader: It is truly right and our greatest joy to give you thanks and praise, God of majesty and splendor.

Lord's Prayer

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

Anthem

#25 (Glory to God) O Lord, Our God, How Excellent (Psalm 8)

Sending

Sending Hymn: **#10 (Glory to God)** Sing Glory to the Name of God (Psalm 29)

Charge and Blessing

Siblings in Christ, we are imitators of Christ; beloved by God. Therefore, go out into the world living lives worthy of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. And as you go, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you and abide with you now and in all the days to come. Amen.

(Do not be afraid to try new things to ritualize the sending and blessing. Offer people a small loaf of bread and invite them to share that loaf with someone who might need to be fed and to engage with that person in conversation. Encourage the congregation to feed someone else this week, whether literally or in a spiritual sense, and to share those stories with you this week. There are so many ways to send people out with the good news of Christ and to challenge them to share that news with others. Use meetings, weekly gatherings and/or social media to prompt conversations about those experiences, so that we are living into community throughout the week, being inspired and encouraged by one another.)